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SUBJECT: SERBIA USES IRAQI MIGS TO SHOW ITSELF AS A TRUSTED PARTNER

Summary

11. (SBU) Serbian Minister of Defense Dragan Sutanovac has confirmed press reports that Serbia has six or seven MiG 21's and 10 MiG 23's which Yugoslavia

received in 1989 from the Iraqi Government for refurbishment. According to Sutanovac, Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki went public with the MiG story to silence domestic criticism for signing a \$100 million arms contract with Serbia in August. The story showed the Serbian public that Sutanovac was looking out

for them in economic hard times. End Summary.

Planes in Boxes

12. (SBU) On August 30 the New York Times reported that Serbia was in possession of several MiG jet fighters sent by Iraq for refurbishment in 1989,

which could not be sent back at the time due to sanctions on Iraq.

(http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/31/world/middleeast/31iraq.html?_r=1).

Minister of Defense Dragan Sutanovac confirmed the details of the press reports to us on August 31, clarifying that Serbia had six or seven MiG 21's and 10 MiG 23's that belong to Iraq. He told us that he was informed of the planes about

six months ago and had told the Iraqis about them on his most recent visit to Baghdad. Sutanovac said the planes, which were moved to Serbia from Croatia when the Yugoslav National Army withdrew, were in storage disassembled and crated. (Daily "Vecernje Novosti" reported on September 1 that the planes are

being stored at the Moma Stanojlovic Factory in Batajnica and in a military warehouse in Pancevo. One MiG 23 was reportedly on display for many years at the Air Force Museum before being moved to the factory in August.)

Payment Needed for Refurbishment

13. (SBU) Sutanovac told us that discussions are ongoing with the government of Iraq regarding payment for refurbishing the planes; he claimed the GOI was interested in using the planes. While Iraq paid the SFRY for the original refurbishment many years ago, significant additional work would be needed to reassemble them and get them in working order again. The original payment was

offset by outstanding GOI debts for Yugoslav construction projects in Iraq, Sutanovac added.

Source of the News Story

¶4. (SBU) Sutanovac claimed that Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki released the information about the MiGs in Serbia to the press for domestic political reasons, to counter criticism for having recently signed a \$100 million arms contract with Serbia. According to the Serbian minister, Maliki sought to show his constituents that Serbia was now a trustworthy partner, not a persecutor of Muslims. Sutanovac pointed out that Serbia was the only country to have informed the government of Iraq about wayward military equipment, despite the fact that several countries -- including, he claimed, Russia and Brazil -- were in a similar situation.

Comment

¶5. (SBU) The Iraqi MiGs that Serbia has discovered are outdated and would undoubtedly be costly to restore to working order. In offering to return the planes to their rightful owners, Serbia appears motivated more by the desire to be seen as a trustworthy partner than the belief that the planes would be a valuable asset to the Iraqi military. Minister Sutanovac, a leader in the Democratic Party, is always conscious of the domestic political impact of any move - in this case, he is showing the Serbian public that he is doing his best to drum up business for the Serbian defense industry at every turn. End

Comment.

BRUSH